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THE CONCEPT OF SIN. F. R. TENNANT. Cambridge University Press. 1912. Pp. 284.

When one compares current theological literature with that which was issued a century ago in New England, nothing is more striking than the difference in respect to the prominence of the doctrine of sin. Then both preachers and theologians were concerned mainly with original sin, its origin, transmission, and guilt, and with the cognate doctrines of atonement, future punishment, and salvation. Now we seldom hear even in revivals of deep conviction of sin; men no longer grovel at the altar, but "rise for prayers" with the air of doing something handsome for the preacher and the Lord. Who knows what is meant by the "law-work" once so firmly insisted upon as the prelude to gracious regeneration? The anxious seat and the mourners' bench are no longer in fashion.

It is noteworthy that Dr. Tennant had given us two valuable treatises on sin before attempting to define precisely what the term means. This is characteristic of current theological procedure. In his latest book, however, the concept is defined with a thoroughness which leaves little to be desired. Sin is defined as "moral imperfection for which an agent is in God's sight accountable," or, more accurately, as "imperfect compliance (in single volitional activity or in character resulting from such activities) with the moral ideal in so far as this is, in the sight of God, capable of apprehension by an agent at the moment of the activity in question, both as to its content and its claim upon him; this imperfect compliance being consequent upon choice of ends of lower ethical worth when the adoption of ends of higher worth is possible, and being regarded in its religious aspect (which may in some cases be wanting)" (p. 245).

Plainly this definition emphasizes the volitional and intentional character of sin. Sins of ignorance are not sins at all. Imperfection is not sin, for in boyhood Jesus had not attained the perfection of mature years, yet he was without sin, and besides perfection includes elements like emotional warmth and soundness of judgment, which are non-ethical. In addition, to regard sin as imperfection flies in the face of evolution.

One may ask what justifies such an elaborate effort to define the concept of sin. The result is of little practical value, for the very inwardness of sin makes it impossible for us to pronounce any particular act a sin or any particular man a sinner. Over and over again it is affirmed that only to the omniscience of God is sin certainly known. This indeed teaches charity of judgment, but it

is of little practical benefit to define a concept of sin in such a way as never to be able to tell where it applies. Nor is it possible for the sinner to pronounce judgment on himself; for (to adopt the author's terminology) he may have psychically a consciousness of sin although psychologically and in the sight of God he is no sinner. Here again, the concept may give relief to over-sensitive consciences; but if neither the man himself nor another can surely apply the concept, it might seem better to drop the term altogether instead of taking such pains to define it. But here we come to the heart of the matter. Dr. Tennant holds that there must be such a thing as sin because church doctrine and the Bible speak of it, and hence it is necessary to define the term accurately that we may understand both it and the context of revealed truth in which it is contained. This indicates a radical squint in the book, of which the author seems quite unaware. It would seem that the concept should be derived from the use of the term in the context of revelation, defined, that is, mainly by exegesis applied to the Scriptures and the Symbols of the Church; but the author grants that Paul has two inconsistent ideas as to sin, and admits that usually Christian thinkers have worked on a false theory. Hence the meaning of sin in its context of revelation is to be corrected by ethical reflection governed by our present moral standards and ideals. The dilemma is this: if a doctrine of sin is part of revealed truth, the definition of the term should be sought only in the revelation; if not, then in view of the many different meanings which the term carries and the resulting difficulties of comprehension, perhaps it would be well to describe accurately the moral experience with which one proposes to deal, instead of trying to define a concept, especially as there is little hope that the definition will be unanimously adopted and consistently employed even by theologians.

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THE EARLY PERSECUTIONS OF THE CHRISTIANS. LEON HARDY CANFIELD, Ph.D. Columbia University Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law. LV, 2. 1913. Pp. 215. \$1.50.

In this interesting study Dr. Canfield reviews with care and thoroughness the whole material for the history of the so-called Christian persecutions down to the close of the reign of Hadrian. He accepts as true what has long been the general conclusion of scholars, that the attitude of the Roman government towards alleged Christians was not definitely determined until a fairly late